



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Court Order to Close Juma Mosque in Azerbaijan

As delivered by Deputy Representative Douglas Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 11, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We are deeply concerned and disappointed by a March 1 court decision in Baku to order the temporary closure of the Juma Mosque. This ruling responds to a lawsuit by Baku city authorities challenging the mosque's lack of legal registration and its right to worship.

The court's order to evict the Juma Mosque community appears to fly in the face of OSCE principles of religious liberty.

We have closely monitored developments in this case, have remained in close touch with the Juma Mosque community, and have repeatedly urged authorities to observe international standards of religious freedom.

We note that the mosque community has one month to appeal the verdict and we call on Azerbaijani authorities to cease any eviction action. We also call on the authorities to grant the community a full and fair appeal, bearing in mind Azerbaijan's OSCE commitments that religious communities should be allowed to practice, free from government interference, under leadership of their own choosing.

Thank you.